



**LULAC's Grassroots Approach to the  
Latino Dropout Problem:  
A Hispanic Education Summit**

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### **League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)**

The Mission of the League of United Latin American Citizens is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health, and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.

LULAC seeks to increase the number of Hispanics serving in appointed and career positions within the Federal government at all levels.

# **THE LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS**

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## ***Acknowledgements***

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# LULAC's Grassroots Approach to the Latino Dropout Problem:

## A Hispanic Education Summit

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*By Manuel L. Isquierdo, LULAC National Education Commission*

*June, 2003*

Hispanics now comprise our nation's largest minority, making the education of every Hispanic student more important than ever. Recent statistics based on the U.S. Census and reported by CNN show that in 2000, 1.56 million U.S. residents between the ages of 16-19 were not high school graduates and were not enrolled in high school. Of that total, 34% -- or more than 528,000 -- were Hispanic. This is staggering in light of the fact that U.S. 2000 Census data show that Hispanics represent only 11% of the population in this age group.

In 1990, Richard Valencia characterized the historically low achievement of Chicano students as persistent, pervasive, and deeply rooted in over 30 years of low educational attainment. In his book, *Chicano School Failure and Success*, Valencia noted that Chicano school failure is not confined to one single location -- wherever Latino communities exist, school failure appears to be widespread.

Many factors have been ascribed to this state of affairs. In his book, *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader*, Antonio Darder states that the educational status of Latinos is closely related to the education they receive and is affected by several interrelated factors including the general state of U.S. urban schools, school segregation and poverty.

**In light of those facts, a single question must be asked: What is the state of education in predominately Latino school districts or communities today?**

While the crisis in Hispanic education has been discussed and debated for several decades, very rarely has the discussion been lead by Latino civil rights groups in partnership with school officials and especially with post-secondary institutions.

LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), the oldest Latino civil rights organization in the U.S., decided to lead the discourse since its mission is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.

LULAC wanted to make educational attainment their number one priority, and strategically, to change the way Latino communities and their schools view the educational crisis. More importantly, LULAC wanted to offer communities a process for identifying the state of Latino educational attainment in local districts, provide suggestions on how this issue can be addressed, and create viable and local solutions.

While many options were considered, LULAC wanted to organize a unique event that would not only address the low educational attainment that has been pervasive, persistent and deeply rooted for over thirty years, but also to address it in a unique, inclusive and strategic manner that would include school personnel and students' voices.

Although LULAC recognized the importance of educational attainment as a K-16 goal, they decided to focus initial attention on Latino secondary schools, believing that this educational crisis was even more critical in the secondary schools. Therefore, in a unique and strategic effort, LULAC designed a grassroots event, called a "Hispanic Education Summit." The first Hispanic Education Summit was held in Cicero, Illinois, February 21-22, 2002.

The Summit involved predominately Latino high schools and was organized as a two-day event. While the leadership for the first Summit clearly came from LULAC, it was sponsored by a coalition of Latino-serving agencies, school officials, and post-secondary institutions.

### **LULAC's Rationale for Concentrating on Latino Secondary Education**

Especially in the last few years, LULAC has been extremely active in reviewing and monitoring the state school report cards of the predominately Latino high schools in Illinois and,

more recently, in Texas. The purpose of the review was to identify and document the status of Latino education in the greater metropolitan/urban areas of Chicago and Dallas, and to use this review to raise the awareness of the low educational attainment Latino youth are experiencing.

Fourteen Illinois schools were included in the LULAC of Illinois study, which sought to quantify the problems facing Illinois Latino communities and secondary schools. The enrollment of each school in the study was at least 45% Latino. Collectively, the 14 schools represented a total of 50% of all Latino students enrolled in public high schools in the state of Illinois. The process of identifying these schools allowed LULAC researchers to verify that most Illinois Latino secondary students were attending schools that were large, segregated, and had disproportionate numbers of low-income students.

**Table 1**

**Illinois' Predominately Latino High Schools – Demographic Characteristics**

<b>Name &amp; Location</b>	<b>% Latino Students</b>	<b># Latino Students</b>	<b>% Low Income</b>
J. Sterling Morton East High School, Cicero	83	2,993	64
Farragut Career Academy, Chicago	89	2,004	94
Carl Schurz High School, Chicago*	73	1,965	88
Roberto Clemente Community Academy, Chicago	85	1,854	89
Kelly High School, Chicago	85	1,833	91
Kelvyn Park High School, Chicago	93	1,722	91
Waukegan High School, Waukegan	48	1,569	45
Benito Juarez Community Academy, Chicago*	99	1,549	94
Curie Metropolitan Academy, Chicago	44	1,386	85
Aurora East High School, Aurora	61	1,290	26
Wells Community Academy, Chicago	81	1,126	93
George Washington High School, Chicago	70	1,051	63
Roosevelt High School Chicago*	52	924	79
Foreman High School, Chicago*	54	896	74

\* Did not participate in summit.

Using data collected by the State of Illinois, LULAC was able to demonstrate that the national crisis in Hispanic education is replicated in numerous schools in Illinois. The following indicators were tracked: average daily attendance rate (ADA), dropout rate, graduation rate, truancy rate (i.e., persistent absence), and college entry exam test scores (ACT test). The compiled data clearly demonstrated that over the last three years, Latino youth were attending schools that were segregated and contained a disproportionate number of low income students. Not only were students in these schools experiencing academic problems, but the schools themselves, by all indicators, were performing poorly and in a state of crisis. The cumulative results pointed towards a troubling picture and unsure future for Latino youth and LULAC felt strongly that something had to be done.

**Table 2**

**Selected Indicators – Predominately Latino High Schools in Illinois**

	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>State of IL</b>
<b>ADA Rate</b>	79.6%	84.9%	85%	95%
<b>Dropout Rate</b>	14.1%	15.1%	14.8%	5.7%
<b>Graduation Rate</b>	67.2%	64.1%	64%	83.2%
<b>Truancy Rate</b>	12.3%	14.5%	10.2%	2.2%
<b>ACT Score</b>	16.8	16.6	16.6	21.7

**Hispanic Education Summit – A Grassroots Strategy**

Upon pinpointing the extent of the crisis in Illinois, LULAC and J. Sterling Morton East High School – Illinois’ largest Latino high school – jointly called for and organized the first Hispanic Education Summit in Illinois. Each of the fourteen schools included in the LULAC study were invited to participate; a total of eleven attended. In preparation for the Summit, each school was encouraged to organize a school-based team of teachers, students, parents, guidance counselors and administrators. It should be noted that Summit organizers were not interested in

establishing blame, but sought to create an opportunity for the interested parties to meet with one other, share perspectives, garner support for addressing the problem and, most importantly, return to their local schools energized to tackle the tough problems at hand.

Summit organizers also invited local elected officials, as well as representatives of various Latino organizations and community agencies, thereby providing Summit participants with opportunities to learn from local community-based Latino organizations and present what they felt were the key issues concerning the Hispanic dropout rate.

### **Summit Activities and Format**

The Summit was held over a period of two days. On the first day, relevant data, statistics, and other information were presented to establish the importance of the big picture – the crisis in Hispanic education. The first day ended with breakout sessions discussing best practices and promising efforts. Summit organizers felt this format would allow participants to get a close-up view of successful programs.

On the second day, participants (team members) were encouraged to identify *their perspectives* on why they felt Latino youth were dropping out. The notion of “perspective” was critical to LULAC which sought to ensure that the Summit succeeded in both broadening and deepening the common understanding of the root causes of the crisis in Latino education. This approach was key to the Summit organizers’ intention to empower and involve all stakeholders in the process of identifying the problems in their communities and on developing school-based action plans.

At the end of the second day, each small group presented a summary of their discussion, highlighting suggestions for future action and potential solutions for the problems they faced. By listening to the detailed accounts from each of the focus groups, Summit participants were able

to develop a working knowledge of the broader issues involved in Latino educational attainment in their community.

### **Summit Goals**

Summit organizers had multiple goals they hoped to accomplish in planning the Hispanic Education Summit. The following goals were identified:

- ◆ Promote a broad-based awareness of the crisis in Latino education in Illinois.
- ◆ Bring together key school-based stakeholders.
- ◆ Create a network of Latino high schools.
- ◆ Share best practices and promising efforts.
- ◆ Assist individual schools in developing action plans tailored to their specific situation and population.
- ◆ Increase funding resources from private or public sectors to combat the Hispanic dropout crisis.
- ◆ Share the results and recommendations from the Summit with local, state, and national legislatures and school officials.

As the Illinois Summit came to an end, National LULAC embraced the Summit process and began immediately to replicate the event in the Dallas Metropolitan area. National LULAC quickly recognized that the Summit process could be a vehicle that other Latino communities could easily replicate in their own communities.

On May 17, 2003, National LULAC and North Texas Metroplex educators sponsored the Second Hispanic Educational Summit based on the 2002 Illinois Summit model. While the North Texas Metroplex educators maintained the Summit format and goals, they held their Summit on one day. The Texas Summit included the participation of seven Dallas Independent School Districts, high schools, and two suburban high schools, all of which were predominantly Hispanic.

The goals of this Summit mirrored those of the Illinois Summit, and were designed to establish a nationwide network of Hispanic high schools, promote awareness and create action plans to address the Hispanic Dropout Crisis, share best practices/promising efforts, and increase funding sources. A follow-up goal was to share the data and best practices, and findings with elected officials and stakeholders in order to promote systemic change in the PK-20 pipeline within the North Texas Metroplex.

The Texas Summit was unique for two reasons. LULAC of Texas, for the first time, involved a post-secondary institution in addressing Latino educational issues. The University of Texas at Arlington was not only the host for the Texas Summit, but a major sponsor of the Summit. In addition to involving a university, the Texas model provided grant money, encouraging them to use the funds for their own school improvement efforts.

Perhaps the most important result of the Texas Summit was National LULAC's adoption of LULAC of Illinois' school improvement criteria as benchmark items in identify the state of Latino educational attainment in other large, urban, predominantly Latino school districts. Using the Illinois indicators, National LULAC is encouraging local Latino communities to identify predominantly Latino high schools in their area that meet the following criteria: are public high schools, have a student enrollment of one thousand or more students, have a Latino enrollment of 50 percent or more, and have at least 50 percent low-income population. Once these schools have been identified, National LULAC recommends that the schools ask themselves the following question: "What is the state of Latino/a educational attainment? LULAC's fear is that the state of education in these communities will mirror what was found in Illinois – an educational crisis!

In the spirit of the Illinois/Texas efforts, National LULAC, under the leadership of President Hector Flores, hopes to foster more grassroots efforts by which Latino communities

can pinpoint the extent of the crisis in their state or region, learn from each other, and provide the local leadership to address the Latino educational attainment issue in their communities.

### **Summit Benefits**

National LULAC created a list of potential benefits for Latino communities and school districts planning a Summit in their region or state:

- A Summit will help each state pinpoint the extent of the Hispanic educational crisis in their state or region, using common benchmark indicators.
- Community organizers can use the data from a Summit to inform public officials and community members of the inequities between predominately Latino schools and other schools.
- A Summit can be the basis for establishing a network or coalition of predominately Latino high schools to share their resources and learn from each other.
- A Summit will bring schools together to share common goals, best practices, and plans for improvement.
- A Summit will help identify schools that are performing well in one or more of the school improvement indicators measured.
- Information from a Summit can be used to advise legislatures and local politicians as to the need for more resources, and to raise the awareness of Latino education issues on a state or regional level.
- A Summit will raise the awareness of Latino Education Crisis in your own community.

### **Conclusion**

Without a doubt, the Illinois and Texas Summits have demonstrated the importance of examining educational challenges Latino youth are experiencing. For the first time, students, parents, educators, community members, Latino organizations, and legislators have come together to address this critical issue, and to assert the importance of holding school districts accountable, and, as a Latino community, to assume responsibility for improving educational opportunities and achievement for Latino youth. With the leadership and support of President Hector Flores, LULAC's National Education Commission, has made a

commitment to sponsoring additional Summit events, believing that the Summit model offers a unique and effective means of addressing the Latino educational crisis at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

### **Follow-up Activities**

It is hoped that the Illinois and Texas Summits will be the beginning of a series of Latino education summits held across the country. To facilitate Latino education summits, National LULAC Educational Commission will disseminate findings, as well as provide information on the Summit model to LULAC executive board members and LULAC councils in other states.

*The preliminary key findings from both the Illinois and Texas Summits will be presented as recommendations following the analysis by the National Education Commission of LULAC.*



***LULAC National Education Agenda:  
Challenges  
and  
Policy Recommendations  
2002-2003***

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